

Federal Defenders OF NEW YORK, INC.

David E. Patton
*Executive Director and
Attorney-in-Chief*

Eastern District
One Pierrepont Plaza-16th Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201
Tel: (718) 330-1200 Fax: (718) 855-0760

Eastern District
Peter Kirchheimer
Attorney-in-Charge

September 4, 2013

The Honorable Kiyo A. Matsumoto
United States District Court
Eastern District of New York
225 Cadman Plaza East
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Re: United States v. Samuel Granados-Hernandez, 11-CR-297

Dear Judge Matsumoto,

Samuel Granados-Hernandez, through counsel, submits this sentencing memorandum in anticipation of his sentencing on October 24, 2013. Mr. Granados-Hernandez pled guilty to sex trafficking in violation of 18 U.S.C § 1591(a)(1), (a)(2) and (b)(1). As he will tell the Court at sentencing, he is deeply remorseful for his actions. He hopes that God will forgive him for his “great sins,” and understands that the court must punish him severely. While it is clear that a case such as this requires a significant sanction, we respectfully submit that a sentence of fifteen years would fully account for all of the statutory §3553(a) goals of sentencing while recognizing the sympathetic individual facts in Mr. Granados-Hernandez’s life.

As an initial matter, we respectfully request that the Court adjourn sentencing in this matter to any date in 2014. I am currently on extended leave from the office from September 1, 2013 through December 31, 2013. Since Mr. Granados-Hernandez faces a fifteen year mandatory minimum in this case, his liberty interests will not be affected by this lengthy adjournment. Moreover, because of the unprecedented budget crisis facing our office, we do not have to resources to reassign a case of this complexity. Finally, given the close attorney-client relationship we have developed over the past two and a half years, it would be neither in Mr. Granados-Hernandez’s best interests (nor in the interest of justice) to reassign this case.

Sex trafficking is, even in its most common instance, cruel and degrading. The upsetting nature of this offense, however, makes it all the more imperative that the law is applied fairly. In

this case, for the reasons set forth in detail below, a measured legal analysis makes clear that two enhancements appear in the PSR without legal basis. Mr. Granados-Hernandez's conduct falls squarely within the heartland of acts that Congress envisioned when designating the stern punishment for the base offense. Accordingly, we ask the Court to view a sentence of 180 months as sufficient, but not greater than necessary, to achieve the aims of sentencing.

I. Background

Samuel Granados-Hernandez comes from a troubled background marred by poverty, little education, and few opportunities for economic stability. Even among the rampant poverty common to his hometown, Tenancingo, Mexico, his family was among the poorest. They lived in a home made of cardboard. They wore tattered second-hand clothing. They had very few prospects for economic stability. In the best of times, one of the richer families who owned a home and some farmland would occasionally allow his parents to tend their animals in exchange for food.

As his family's eldest son, Samuel Granados-Hernandez was forced to support his family. He bore this responsibility even as a child. At age seven, Mr. Granados-Hernandez stopped attending school and started to find work to support his family. For the next seven years, he labored tirelessly in agricultural labor picking tomatoes for meager wages. When he was fifteen, he began to work in construction. His family depended on him to contribute support to his struggling family. Even when he first arrived in this United States, at twenty-four, he picked through garbage at parks to find cans for recycling to support himself.

Samuel Granados-Hernandez worked hard because from an early age he learned that any money that he earned might mean that his younger brothers and sisters might know abject poverty with a bit less familiarity. These strong familial obligations motivated Samuel Granados-Hernandez to commit the instant offense. Up until his arrest, he sent \$1000-4000 each month to Mexico to support his parents, with whom he is still close. He also sent money to support his wife's mother and his own three children. Mr. Granados-Hernandez felt a deep fiscal responsibility as a member of a family that depended on him to play a role in their survival. The hopes of Mr. Granados-Hernandez and his family are being borne out by his youngest siblings. Mr. Granados-Hernandez's younger sister Jacinta, who is nineteen, had been attending university. She paid her tuition through Mr. Granados-Hernandez's remittances. Since his arrest, Jacinta has been forced to stop her studies. His youngest brother Jorge, fifteen, has been able to remain in school thus far but the family may have to ask him to stop attending in order to work.

Nevertheless, the abject poverty Mr. Granados-Hernandez endured as a child only partially explains how a loving family man could become involved in such egregious acts against women. Many poor defendants commit less egregious crimes to support their family. Most poor people do not turn to crime to support themselves at all. One might reasonably wonder how the path from abject poverty leads to such a dark and sinister crime.

In researching Mr. Granados-Hernandez's background, we were surprised to learn that he comes from a vastly different social world than what we know in the United States. In Tenancingo, sex trafficking is an almost common tragic fact of life. In a recent survey, as many as four out of five teens in Tenancingo indicated that they aspired to engage in human trafficking, and this pattern has been repeated for more than forty years. "*The Village of Child Pimps*" June 30, 2013, El País attached as Defendant's Exhibit A. As one commentator observed, "The traffickers earn money, allowing them to financially support the community Trafficking has become an aspiration for young people and even children in the village. "Tenancingo, Travel to the Capital of Sexual Slavery in Mexico" BBC News.com May 22, 2012 attached as Defendant's Exhibit B. It is not uncommon that a poor couple will engage in sex trafficking for a number of years, buy some land, and then proceed to live out the rest of their life without crime. The origins of their wealth are not discussed. Their children grow up middle-class and go on to be doctors, lawyers and business owners. In Tenancingo, the two social classes are those who have attained a middle-class life through crime, and those who are still poor and still exploited by crime.

Mr. Granados-Hernandez grew up in Tenancingo. Tenancingo is where he learned the difference between right and wrong. Tenancingo is where Mr. Granados-Hernandez learned how to treat women. The egregious conduct he engaged in throughout this offense was the product of socialization seared by abject poverty. None of this excuses Mr. Granados-Hernandez for his conduct in this case. To his credit, he has taken the time since he was arrested to reflect upon his actions. He was initially shocked to learn of the significant penalties he faced in this case. While he knew what he was doing was illegal, he did not initially grasp the seriousness of his conduct. In the year and a half since he was taken into custody he has come to understand his conduct differently. He recognizes that his genuine love for the female members of his family is incompatible with his treatment of the female victims in this case. For the first time, Mr. Granados-Hernandez can view his life from beyond the distorted lens of Tenancingo. He looks back in hindsight with only shame and genuine remorse. He believes not only that he has committed serious crimes, but that he has committed serious acts against God.

Here, we ask the Court to consider Samuel Granados-Hernandez's background in considering what sentence would be sufficient but not greater than necessary to achieve the goals of sentencing. His background makes clear that he is not a monster. He did not grow up in a moral vacuum. Instead, he grew up in an isolated, tragic and unimaginably distorted social

¹ Juan Diego Quesada, *El Pueblo de los Niños Proxeneta*, EL PAÍS (Jun. 30, 2013), http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2013/06/30/actualidad/1372556638_992102.html (Profiling the conditions in Tenancingo and the culture that perpetuates sex trafficking. The title translates as "The Village of the Pimp Children."); see also, Ignacio de los Reyes, *Tenancingo, Viaje a la Capital de la Esclavitud Sexual en México*, BBC WORLD (May 22, 2013), http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/noticias/2012/05/120522_trata_mujeres_mexico_eeuu_sexual_pea.shtml.

environment. We ask the Court to consider his background as a mitigating circumstance that helps to explain how a loving family man could commit such terrible acts against women.

II. The Applicable Sentencing Guidelines

We object to the guidelines calculation set forth in the pre-sentence report ("PSR"), which indicates an applicable guidelines range of 262-327 months. This is based upon a total offense level of 39 and a criminal history category I. Specifically, we object to two enhancements applied in the PSR's offense level computation. A two-point victim-related adjustment for "vulnerable victim" pursuant to Guideline 3A1.1 was applied to each of the calculations associated with each victim without legal authority. Additionally, a three-point enhancement for serious and life threatening injuries has been misapplied in the analysis related to Jane Doe # 7.

These two errors increase Mr. Granados-Hernandez's total offense level by 5, putting his sentence well above the level appropriate for his offense. For the reasons set out below, we believe these enhancements are legally inapplicable to his case. Accordingly, we respectfully submit that Mr. Granados-Hernandez's correct applicable sentencing range is 151-186. This is based upon a corrected total offense level of 34. We agree with the probation department insofar as it recommends that Mr. Granados-Hernandez be sentenced in criminal history category I. He has no criminal contacts in this (or any other) jurisdiction. Accordingly, a sentence of 180 months would be at the high end of the correct applicable guideline range in this case.

A.Vulnerable Victim Adjustment

A two- level "vulnerable victim" enhancement appears in the calculations for each victim. E.g., PSR 1¶96. The application of this victim-related adjustment is legally inappropriate in this case. U.S.S.G. § 3A1.1 is designed to punish defendants who select victims so vulnerable as to make the crime *unusually* abhorrent. "The adjustment would apply, for example, in a fraud case where the defendant marketed an ineffective cancer cure, or in the robbery where the defendant selected a handicapped victim." U.S.S.G. § 3A1.1, application note 2. The victim must be differentiated from other typical victims of that crime by a vulnerability that goes beyond the level of vulnerability necessary to commit the crime in most instances. The government has previously endorsed the "unusual differentiation from the typical victim" standard as the authoritative interpretation of 3A1.1:

As the Solicitor General has contended, section 3A1.1 was intended to apply only when the special vulnerability of the victim makes the offender more culpable than he otherwise would be in committing the particular offense. When circumstances "differentiate the victim from the typical victim of that particular crime, so that the defendant's conduct was more

culpable than that of the typical perpetrator of that crime,” enhancement under section 3A1.1 is justified because the defendant’s offense level does not otherwise account for his heightened culpability. In contrast, when the victim is the typical victim of the crime, a section 3A1.1 enhancement is improperly duplicative because the defendant’s offense level already accounts fully for the level of culpability which the Sentencing Commission ascribed to that crime. United States v. Morrill, 984 F.2d 1136, 1138 (11th Cir. 1993) (internal citations omitted).

A victim must not just be “more vulnerable than most,” their condition must make them “particularly” vulnerable, to the point of being substantially unable to avoid being a victim of the crime. United States v. McCall, 174 F.3d 47, 51 (2d. Cir. 1998). This vulnerability must also be “unusual,” beyond the traits many victims of the crime may be expected to possess. See United States v. Paige, 923 F.2d 112, 113–14 (8th Cir. 1991) (reversing application of enhancement even though defendant targeted young store clerks because he considered them inexperienced and naive; such clerks were not *unusually* vulnerable); United States v. Moree, 897 F.2d 1329 (5th Cir. 1990) (“The vulnerability that triggers § 3A1.1 must be an “unusual” vulnerability which is present in only some victims of that type of crime. Otherwise, the defendant’s choice of a likely victim does not show the extra measure of criminal depravity which § 3A1.1 intends to more severely punish.”).

Here we do not dispute, as the probation department observes, that the sex workers Mr. Granados-Hernandez trafficked were poor, uneducated women from an impoverished country. However, these characteristics do not rise to the level where a “vulnerable victim” enhancement is appropriate. It is a sad reality that this is precisely the class of person who typically becomes a victim in this type of offense. It is clear that Congress considered these characteristics when writing these laws. The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, which established 18 U.S.C. §1591, notes that “[t]raffickers primarily target women and girls, who are disproportionately affected by poverty, lack of access to education, chronic unemployment, discrimination, and lack of viable economic opportunities in countries of origin. Traffickers lure women and girls into their networks through false promises of good working conditions at relatively high pay as nannies, maids, dancers, factory workers, restaurant workers, sales clerks, or models. Traffickers also buy girls from poor families and sell them into prostitution or into various types of forced or bonded labor.” H.R. Rep. No. 106-939 (2000). Congress understood the tragic vulnerability of typical victims when establishing the guidelines for 18 U.S.C. § 1591, and the base offense level reflects the depravity inherent in the typical instance of the offense. Here, the base offense level for this offense already contemplates victims facing these circumstances.

While the Second Circuit has not fully defined the contours of this enhancement, a survey of decisions by other Courts makes clear that the circumstances present in the lives of these victims do not rise to a level legally sufficient to justify imposition of the §3A1.1 enhancement.

Women who may be unemployed, uneducated, teenage mothers are not “unusually vulnerable” victims of forced prostitution to justify a 3A1.1 adjustment. United States v. Sabatino, 943 F.2d 94 (1st Cir. 1991) (“. . .[A]n adjustment for vulnerable victims under U.S.S.G. § 3A1.1 would have been proper only if the young women employed as prostitutes by the [Defendants] were ‘unusually vulnerable,’ that is, ‘unusually vulnerable’ given the kind of victim that is typically involved in a Mann Act violation and that Congress aimed to protect.”) By contrast, sex traffickers may also target victims who are disabled or drug-addicted. These victims are significantly more vulnerable than most young women and in those cases, a 3A1.1 adjustment would be appropriate. *C.f. e.g., United States v. Kizer*, 2013 WL 979141 (6th Cir. 2013) (slip opinion) (finding a vulnerable adjustment was warranted where the victim was addicted to crack); United States v. Lee, 2008 WL 162847 (2d. Cir. 2008) (summary order) (finding a vulnerable victim adjustment was warranted where the victims were homeless children). Absent more severe factors of disability and vulnerability, a two-level enhancement is inappropriate for the victims in this case. The base offense level fully accounts for the harm identified by the probation department.

B. Serious Bodily Injury Adjustment

A three-level serious bodily injury adjustment appears in the offense level computation for Count One(B). PSR 1¶103. This three-level adjustment under 2A3.1(b)(4)(C) is not justified by the specific facts of this case. Although there is no doubt that Mr. Granados-Hernandez mistreated Jane Doe #7, his use of force is already accounted for by a specific four-level adjustment per 2A3.1(b)(1), to which we do not object. The three-level special offense characteristic adjustment, however, is reserved for situations in which injury occurs to the victim that is so severe as to approach serious bodily injury all the way up to life-threatening. U.S.S.G § 2A3.1(b)(1). The Probation Department contends that Jane Doe #7 suffered a “serious bodily injury” insofar as she received a medicinally-induced abortion. Respectfully, the medical termination of a fetus does not constitute “serious bodily injury” to the victim for the purpose of a guidelines enhancement.

As an initial matter, guideline §2A3.1(b)(4) establishes a range of enhancements ranging from +2 points for a serious bodily injury to +4 for a permanent or life threatening injury. The PSR includes a +3 enhancement and probation department contends that Jane Doe #7 suffered both serious and life threatening injuries.² However, the pre-sentence report does not discuss what those serious or life threatening injuries are. Here, though we do not dispute that Jane Doe #7 suffered injuries, these injuries do not rise to a level that would support even the +2 “serious bodily” injury enhancement. Accordingly, neither the +4, nor even the +3 enhancement, are applicable in this case.

² The +3 intermediate §2A3.1(a)(4)(C) enhancement would apply if the victim suffered something BETWEEN serious and life threatening injuries.

For the purposes of 2A3.1(b)(1), "serious bodily injury" means "injury involving extreme physical pain or the protracted impairment of a function of a bodily member, organ, or mental faculty; or requiring medical intervention such as surgery, hospitalization, or physical rehabilitation. In addition "serious bodily injury" is deemed to have occurred if the offense involved conduct constituting criminal sexual abuse under 18 U.S.C. §2241 or §2242 or "any similar offense under state law." U.S.S.G. § 1B1.1, application note 1(L).

First, although we concede that this offense involved conduct covered by 18 U.S.C. §2241, he already receives a specific 18 U.S.C. §2241 +4 point enhancement pursuant to §2A3.1(b)(1). Without a specific inquiry into level of injury sustained by Jane Doe #7, applying enhancement for both subsection 1 and 6 would constitute impermissible double counting. As the Second Circuit has observed, "Impermissible double counting occurs when one part of the guidelines is applied to increase a defendant's sentence to reflect the kind of harm that has already been fully accounted for by another part of the guidelines." United States v. Napoli, 179 F.3d 1, 12 n.9 (2d Cir. 1999) (internal quotation marks omitted), *cert. denied*, 145 L. Ed. 2d 1084, 120 S. Ct. 1176 (2000). Here, it is clear that 18 U.S.C. §2241 is not intended to trigger both §2A3.1(b)(1) and §2A3.1(b)(6)(C). This reading would render the existence of (b)(6)(C) to be entirely superfluous since any instance where (b)(1) applied would necessarily be an instance where (b)(6) applied as well. In order for (b)(6)(C) to have any meaning, the Court should make a fact specific inquiry into whether a "serious bodily injury" exists that justifies imposition of the (b)(6)(C) enhancement.

Though the Second Circuit has not meaningfully explored the factors that justify a §2A3.1(b)(6) enhancement, a survey of other decisions in other circuits do identify some factors that could support a (b)(6) enhancement. See United States v. Yankton, 986 F.2d 1225 (8th Cir. 1993) (Finding that 2A3.1(b)(4) did not include injuries suffered by a woman whose sexual abuse resulted in a miscarriage of one twin and the post-natal death of the other); United States v. Price, 434 Fed.Appx 98 (3rd Cir. 2011)(2A3.1(b)(4)(C) applies where injuries such as "broken bones, deep lacerations and concussions" are sustained by the victim.); United States v. Scott, 434 Fed.Appx 155 (3rd Cir. 2011)(same: 2A3.1(b)(4)(C) applies where injuries such as "broken bones, deep lacerations and concussions" are sustained by the victim). In all of these cases, the Court declined to mechanically apply a (b)(6) enhancement even though the conduct could have constituted criminal sexual abuse under 18 U.S.C. §2241. Instead, the Court sensibly conducted a fact specific inquiry into the level of serious bodily injury to determine whether the enhancement was appropriate.

Here, Jane Doe # 7 was not injured to a degree that rises to the level of "serious bodily injury" for the purposes of a (b)(6) enhancement. The presentence report notes the use of a pill that induced a miscarriage. Presumably, this refers to the use of RU-486, or Mifeprex, the only

medication approved by the Food and Administration for early termination of pregnancy. The Food and Drug Administration has exhaustively tested this medication and has not linked use of this drug to death or serious injury. The pill remains approved by the FDA for safe use. See MIFEPREX INFORMATION available at <http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/PostmarketDrugSafetyInformationforPatientsandProviders/ucm111323.htm>. Pill-induced abortions are often safer and less traumatic than surgical abortions. Renee C. Wyser-Pratte, *Protection of RU-486 as Contraception, Emergency Contraception and as an Abortifacient Under the Law of Contraception*, 79 OR. L. REV. 1121 (Winter 2000). Pill-induced abortions require no medical intervention, and, once prescribed, require no hospitalization or medical treatment. See *Benten v. Kessler*, 799 F.Supp. 281 (E.D.N.Y. 1992) (Ruling an FDA ban on RU-486 invalid as the drug is safe and effective). Mifepristone is as safe as or safer than other commonly used medications. The number of adverse events associated with Mifepristone is less, for example, than for such medications as Viagra and Tylenol. Danco Laboratories, Mifeprex® (mifepristone) Background Information, December 15, 2004; Association of Reproductive Health Professionals, What You Need to Know: Mifepristone Safety Overview, at <http://www.arhp.org/uploadDocs/mifepristonefactsheet.pdf>. The use of Mifepristone alone does not rise to the level of a serious bodily injury within the meaning of (b)(6). The application of a (b)(6) enhancement for even a two level enhancement is not justified.

While we acknowledge the significant toll this conduct has taken on Jane Doe #7, the loss at issue here is emotional, not bodily. The procedure itself has been determined to be safe and results in no harm to the mother's body. Nevertheless, we do not suggest that the Court should simply ignore this conduct. However, the nature of the injury described does not warrant an additional enhancement beyond the specific +4 18 U.S.C. §2241 he is already receiving. Respectfully, §2A3.1(b)(4) does not apply in this case.

C. Applicable Sentencing Guidelines

Because these enhancements are inapplicable, we submit that the following sentencing offense level calculation is correct:

For Count One (A), (B), and (C)

Base offense level. U.S.S.G. 2A3.1(b)

30

Special offense characteristic for the use of physical force and threats of serious bodily injury

+4

Adjustment for Role in the Offense (none)

0

Adjustment for Obstruction of Justice (none)

0

Adjusted offense level **34**

Multiple-Count Adjustment

Number of units for all counts

3

Greater of the adjusted offense levels

34

Increase in Offense level per 3D1.4

+3

Combined Adjusted Offense level

37

Adjustment for Acceptance of Responsibility per 3E1.1(a) and (b)

-3

Total Offense level

34

For a defendant with a total offense level of 34 and criminal history category of I, the applicable guideline range is 151-188 months.

Sex trafficking is undeniably a serious crime that justifies a significant sanction. However, it cannot be meaningfully disputed that 180 months, or 15 years, is a significant and lengthy term of incarceration. An offense level of 34 is near the top of the guidelines. The enhancements sought in the PSR would push the punishment range into territory reserved for the most heinous instances of this crime, or indeed, of any crime. The facts of this case do not support these draconian sentencing enhancements. A sentence of 180 months, near the top of the applicable guidelines range, is sufficient but not greater than necessary to meet the goals of sentencing in this case.

III. Section 3553(a) Factors

Section 3553(a)(1) asks the court to consider "the nature and circumstances of the offense and the history and characteristics of the defendant." The nature and circumstances of this particular offense are indeed troubling. There is little question that this is a serious offense. It is an unfortunate reality though that the Mr. Granados-Hernandez's conduct here falls within the heartland of other sex trafficking 18 U.S.C. 1591 cases. We recognize that a significant penalty is appropriate in this case.

Section 3553(a)(2)(A) directs the court to impose as sentence "to reflect the seriousness of the offense, to promote respect for the law, and to provide just punishment for the offense." Here a sentence of fifteen years, a sentence at the high end of the applicable guidelines, is sufficient but not greater than necessary to achieve these goals. A sentence of fifteen years sends a clear message to anyone who would seek to imitate Mr. Granados-Hernandez that there are significant and life altering consequences for this offense. In this regard, a fifteen year sentence is sufficient but not greater than necessary to achieve the statutory goal of general deterrence. As the Supreme Court has observed, an overly harsh sentence "may work to promote not respect, but derision of the law if the law is viewed as merely a means to dispense harsh punishment without taking into account the real conduct and circumstances involved in sentencing." Gall v. United States, 552 U.S. 38, 54 (2007).

There is little question that a fifteen year sentence will accomplish the goal of specific deterrence. This sentence will prevent Mr. Granados-Hernandez from committing other crimes. Mr. Granados-Hernandez will be nearly fifty when he is released from prison. He will certainly not be capable of this kind of scheme any longer, especially because he will be deported and prevented from reentering the United States ever again. Besides this offense, Mr. Granados-Hernandez has not engaged in crime and has been a hard worker in many legitimate jobs since the time he was a child. He will have aged out of crime, and will likely contribute to his family and community in a peaceful and positive way once released. A sentence longer than fifteen years will do nothing to change what Mr. Granados-Hernandez will do upon release. It will unnecessarily delay Mr. Granados-Hernandez's reunion with his family and impair his ability to assist his family through legitimate work.

Finally, a guidelines compliant sentence of fifteen years will appropriately recognize the numerous sympathetic §3553 factors present in Mr. Granados-Hernandez's case. As we previously discussed, Mr. Granados-Hernandez grew up in abject poverty. There were very few prospects of legitimate economic prosperity available to him. He committed these crimes in the, albeit misguided, belief that he might be able to provide some measure of economic stability for his family. This is Mr. Granados-Hernandez's first criminal contact and a fifteen-year sentence will forever alter his life and put his family into disarray. We acknowledge, and he understands, that it is his conduct alone that created these unfortunate circumstances. Nevertheless, we ask the Court to impose a sentence that reflects meaningful consideration of these sympathetic §3553 factors.

IV. Conclusion

As he will tell the Court in his own words at sentencing, Samuel Granados-Hernandez is deeply remorseful for his actions in this case. Mr. Granados-Hernandez committed a terrible crime and it is undisputed that a significant punitive sanction is appropriate to account for the statutory goals of sentencing. Here, we submit that a guidelines sentence of 180 months is sufficient but not greater than necessary to achieve these goals.

Respectfully submitted,



Len Hong Kamdang
Attorney to Samuel Granados-Hernandez
Federal Defenders of New York, Inc.
One Pierrepont Plaza, 16th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201
(718)407-7414

Copies to:

Ms. Angelica Deniz, United States Probation Department (via hand delivery)
Ms. Soumya Dayananda , United States Attorney's Office (via ECF)
Mr. Samuel Granados-Hernandez (65559-053), Metropolitan Detention Center (via first class mail)

Exhibit A

Tenancingo, viaje a la capital de la esclavitud sexual en México

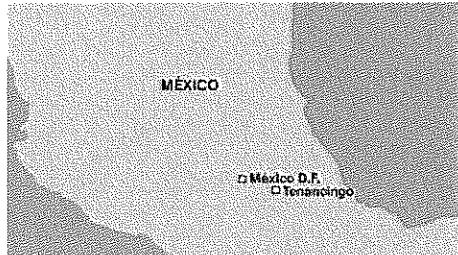
Ignacio de los Reyes, BBC Mundo, México

Última actualización: Martes, 22 de mayo de 2012

Tenancingo podría ser un pueblo mexicano cualquiera, con su iglesia en el centro, sus calles de casas bajas y los caminos de tierra en los alrededores. Pero no lo es.

El impresionante Ferrari rojo a las puertas de un motel, las viviendas con torres de colores y cristales tintados, la camioneta Lincoln aparcada en la calle no serían parte del paisaje en un pueblo mexicano cualquiera, pero sí de Tenancingo, "la capital de la trata de personas".

Así la han bautizado organizaciones de ayuda a las mujeres, que advierten que en esta localidad de apenas 10.000 habitantes, ubicada en el estado de Tlaxcala, cerca del 10% de la población se dedica al reclutamiento, explotación sexual y venta de mujeres.



El camino que conduce a esta localidad del centro de México, una carretera rodeada por volcanes, ya prepara al visitante. "¿Tenancingo? ¿Por qué quieren ir? Allí no hay nada que ver", advierte el empleado de una gasolinera a pocas calles del desvío a la ciudad.

Pero en Tenancingo hay mucho que ver. Quizás por eso las organizaciones de trata de personas se aseguran de que sus halcones o vigilantes estén muy atentos a la llegada de forasteros.

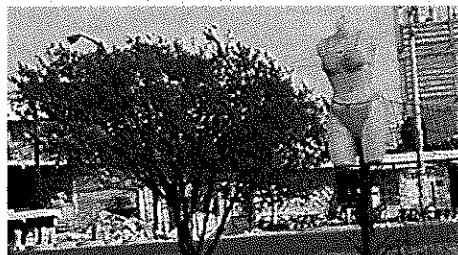
"Hemos recibido denuncias anónimas de ese lugar, pero cuando intentamos hacer el operativo para rescatar a las mujeres nos encontramos con una red de halcones que vigilan desde un pueblo antes y advierten de la llegada de cualquier auto ajeno a Tenancingo", le dice a BBC Mundo Irene Herrerías, la Fiscal federal de la Procuraduría de Atención a Víctimas del Delito (Provictima).

"Cuando llegábamos al lugar ya no estaban las víctimas ni los tratantes", añade.

Las extravagantes mansiones -algunas, según las leyendas de los locales, decoradas con oro en su interior- siguen ahí, pero sus habitantes desaparecen.

La cuna de los padrones

Este lugar tiene una larga historia de complicidad con la explotación de mujeres. De aquí han salido las más importantes familias de proxenetes o "padrones", como dicen los mexicanos, y según el gobierno de Estados Unidos, es el mayor foco de trata de personas en Norteamérica.



Dicen que en Tenancingo no hay mucho que ver, pero también hay muchos impidiendo que se vea.

Según Naciones Unidas, es un punto crítico para la lucha contra la esclavitud sexual en todo el continente.

Las propias autoridades locales reconocen que Tenancingo tiene su lado oscuro, aunque advierten que están trabajando para erradicarlo.

"Hay trata de personas, pero no en la dimensión que se maneja, no puedo tapar el sol con un dedo", reconoció recientemente a medios locales el alcalde del municipio, José Carmen Rojas.

"En ese lugar hay gente de bien que quiere borrar la leyenda negra del municipio, estigmatizado por el problema de la trata de personas", dijo.

Negocio familiar

Recientemente se han aprobado leyes, tanto en Tlaxcala como en otros estados del país, para castigar la trata con penas de cárcel más severas, pero según las autoridades, todavía hay un gran obstáculo que dificulta la persecución de los criminales: la trata es algo "normal" en algunas familias.

"El problema se inició hace 40 o 50 años", le dice a BBC Mundo Emilio Muñoz, director del Centro Fray Julian Garcés, que atiende a víctimas e impulsa nueva legislación contra la trata en Tlaxcala.

"Los tratantes empezaron a ganar dinero, lo que les permitió apoyar económicamente a la comunidad, pagando fiestas e infraestructuras. Ser tratante se convirtió en una aspiración para los jóvenes e incluso niños del pueblo... Se convirtió en algo cultural", dice.



Cuando envían a las chicas a Ciudad de México, se quedan con sus hijos, si los tienen, como seguro.

La trata se ha enraizado tanto en Tenancingo que la explotación de mujeres se ha convertido en un negocio familiar más. Y la especialidad de los padrones de Tenancingo, su denominación de origen, es conquistar a sus víctimas.

"Hemos visto casos de rapto a la salida de puestos de trabajo y escuelas, o incluso venta de mujeres en las comunidades indígenas, pero la técnica más utilizada es el enamoramiento", dice Emilio Muñoz.

"Los tratan van a lugares del país altamente marginados, se presentan como comerciantes y enamoran a las mujeres. Les prometen una casa, un buen coche... todo lo que ellas nunca podrían tener. Luego las traen a Tlaxcala, donde las convencen para prostituirse como única alternativa para que la familia sobreviva", explica.

Los hombres heredan las técnicas de seducción de sus padres, las madres se encargan de preparar las bodas entre el patrón y la víctima, de convencer a las mujeres de que la prostitución es el único camino.

Y de quedarse con sus hijos cuando éstas son enviadas a Ciudad de México o a alguna gran ciudad de Estados Unidos, asegurándose así de que las mujeres no escaparán a denunciar.

Rehenes de por vida

María, una joven centroamericana, sabe lo que es sufrir este abuso.

Salió de su país con la promesa de trabajar como mesera en un restaurante, pero fue vendida de prostíbulo en prostíbulo. Ahora vive en un refugio para víctimas en México y sueña con convertirse en futbolista.

"Algunos clientes te tratan bien y otros no, pero yo doy gracias a Dios de que no me pasara nada, algunas compañeras han acabado muertas", le dice a BBC Mundo.

"Amé me quitaron todos los documentos y hasta el número de teléfono de mi mamá. Me decían que tendría que trabajar hasta que pagara la deuda, el viaje que había hecho desde mi país hasta aquí. Y que no intentara huir", cuenta.

Pero María no huyó. Fue rescatada en un operativo de las autoridades migratorias.

"Muchas mujeres explotadas se niegan a reconocerse como víctimas", explica la fiscal Irene Herrerías.

"En otros delitos, las víctimas acuden a las autoridades y denuncian -dice Herrerías-, pero ellas viven enganchadas al tratante o están amenazadas por ellos".

Machismo

Tenancingo es sólo la cara más visible del dinero que deja la trata de personas en México.

Las mujeres son reclutadas en al menos 11 estados de la República y explotadas por lo menos en otros nueve, incluyendo Tlaxcala, pero también en grandes ciudades de Estados Unidos como Houston, Nueva York o Miami, de acuerdo a los testimonios recogidos por el Centro Fray Julián.

Video: refugio para prostitutas ancianas

Este lunes, 27 mujeres fueron rescatadas en el céntrico barrio de La Merced, la zona roja de la capital mexicana. Allí es posible ver a plena luz del día a las mujeres, pero también a los padrones, que observan en la distancia.

Muchas de ellas están en la calle de manera voluntaria, otras sufren la explotación de las redes en casas escondidas entre los callejones de La Merced, obligadas a tener hasta 40 relaciones sexuales en una sola jornada.

Como ellas, cada año miles de mujeres caen en estas redes por todo el país, según ONGs de México y EEUU. Pero todavía no hay cifras estadísticas claras que permitan entender la magnitud de este negocio.

"Hay un factor cultural muy determinante", explica Felipe De La Torre, coordinador regional del proyecto contra la trata de personas de Naciones Unidas.

"Gran parte de la sociedad mexicana tiene todavía rasgos muy fuertes de machismo, por lo que hay una actitud en algunas esferas de la sociedad resistente a aceptar que mujeres y víctimas pueden ser forzadas a ejercer la prostitución", le dice a BBC Mundo el representante de la ONU.

Así, tanto las que se quedan en México como las vendidas como mercancía sexual en otras partes del mundo, las víctimas de trata viven a merced de los padrones.

Algunas, temerosas de que algo pueda ocurrirle a los hijos que han tenido que dejar en los lugares donde fueron reclutadas.

Otras, viviendo una segunda condena: vivir enamoradas aún de los hombres que les han robado su vida.

Más noticias



[¿Qué tan correcta es la pirámide de Maslow?](#)

Tenancingo, a trip to the capital of sexual slavery in Mexico

Ignacio de los Reyes
BBC Mundo, Mexico
Tuesday, May 22, 2012

Tenancingo could be any Mexican town, with its downtown church, its low houses and dirt road outskirts. But it is not.

The impressive red Ferrari parked outside a motel, the houses with colored towers and tinted windows, the Lincoln van parked on the street would not be part of the scenery in an ordinary Mexican town, but it is in Tenancingo, “the capital of human trafficking”.

Women’s aid organizations have given it that name; they warn that in this town of only 10,000 inhabitants, situated in the State of Tlaxcala, nearly 10% of the population works in the recruitment, sexual exploitation and sale of women.

The road leading to this town in Central Mexico, a highway surrounded by volcanoes, already prepares the visitor. “Tenancingo? Why do you want to go there? There is nothing to see there” warns the employee of the gas station near to the town exit.

But in Tenancingo there is a lot to see. Maybe because of this, the human trafficking organizations make sure that their hawks or guards keep an eye on the arrival of outsiders.

“We have received anonymous complaints about this place, but when we try to set up a women rescue operation, we encounter a network of hawks that keep a close eye from nearby towns and warn of the arrival of any outsider car”, says to BBC Mundo Irene Herrerías, the Federal Prosecutor at Support Program for Crime Victims (Provictim).

“When we would get to the place neither the victims nor the human traffickers were there”, she adds.

The extravagant mansions - some, according to local legends, decorated with gold inside – are still there, but the inhabitants have disappeared.

The pimps birthplace

This place has a long history of complicity with women exploitation. The most important pimps, or “padrotes” as the Mexicans call them, have come from here and according to the United States Government it is the largest human trafficking focus in North America.

According to the United Nations, it is a critical point in the fight against sexual slavery in the entire continent.

Even the local authorities admit that Tenancingo has its dark side, but they say they are working

to eradicate it.

"There is human trafficking, but not to the extent they claim; I cannot bury my head in the sand" Mayor José Carmen Rojas admitted recently.

"In that place there are good people that want to efface this town's dark legend, the stigma due to the human trafficking problem", he said.

Family Business

Laws have been passed recently, in Tlaxcala as well as in other states of the country, to punish human trafficking by more severe sentences, but according to the authorities, there still is a great obstacle that makes the prosecution of the criminals very difficult: human trafficking is "normal" in some families.

"The problem started 40 or 50 years ago" said Emilio Muñoz, director of Fray Julián Garcés Center, an institution that treats victims and encourages new legislation against human trafficking in Tlaxcala.

"The human traffickers started to make money which allowed them to support the community financially, paying for parties and infrastructure. To be a human trafficker turned into an aspiration for the youngsters and even for the town's children ... it turned into something cultural", he says.

Human trafficking has taken roots in Tenancingo, and women exploitation has turned into another family business, and the specialty of the Tenancingo pimps is the conquest of their victims.

"We have seen cases of women being kidnaped when leaving work or school and even the sale of women from Indian communities, but the most used technique is the wooing ", says Emilio Muñoz.

"The human traffickers go to the country highly marginal places and they introduce themselves as businessmen and woo the women. They promise them a home, a good car ... all they could never have. Then they bring them to Tlaxcala where they convince them to prostitute themselves as the only way for the family to survive", he explains.

The men inherit the seduction techniques from their fathers; the mothers take care of the wedding preparations, and convince the women that prostitution is the only way. They also keep their children when they are sent to Mexico City or any other big city of the United States, making sure that the women will not run away or press charges.

Hostages for life

Maria, a Central American girl knows all about suffering this abuse. She left her country with

the promise of a job as a waitress in a restaurant, but she was sold from brothel to brothel. Now she lives in a victims shelter in Mexico and dreams of becoming a football player.

“Some clients treat you well but others don’t, but I thank God that nothing bad happened to me; some girls have ended up dead”, she tells BBC Mundo.

“They took away all my documents and even my mother’s phone number; they told me I had to work until I paid back my debt from the trip from my country to here, and not try and flee”, she says.

But María did not flee. She was rescued in an immigration authorities operation.

“Many exploited victims refuse to recognize themselves as victims”, explains the prosecutor, Irene Herrerías.

“In other crimes, the victims go to the authorities and press charges”, says Herrerías “but these victims are hung up on the human trafficker or they are threatened by them”.

Machismo

Tenancingo is just the most visible face of the money generated by human trafficking in Mexico.

Women are recruited in at least 11 states of the Republic and exploited in at least 9 other, including Tlaxcala, but also in big cities in the United States such as Houston, New York or Miami, according to testimonies collected by Fray Julian Center.

This Monday, 27 women were rescued in the downtown neighborhood of La Merced, the Mexican capital red-light district. There you can find, in broad daylight, the women as well as the pimps that observe from a distance.

Many of them walk the streets voluntarily, others suffer the exploitation in hidden houses in the alleys of La Merced, forced to have up to 40 sexual acts per day.

Every year thousands of women fell into the trap of these networks throughout the entire country, according to Mexican and American NGOs. But there still are no clear statistics that may allow us to understand the extent of the business.

“There is a very determining cultural factor”, explains Felipe De La Torre, regional coordinator for the United Nations’ project against human trafficking.

“A great part of Mexican society still has strong machismo traits, so there is an attitude in some circles of society that resist the idea that women and victims may be forced into prostitution”, says the United Nations representative to BBC Mundo.

Therefore, both those that remain in Mexico as well as those that are sold as sexual merchandise

in other parts of the world, the human trafficking victims live at the mercy of the pimps.

Some are fearful that something bad may happen to the children they had to leave behind, where they were recruited.

Others are living a second sentence; they are still in love with the men that have stolen away their lives.

Exhibit B

EL PAÍS**INTERNACIONAL**

El pueblo de los niños proxenetas

En Tenancingo, un pequeño municipio mexicano, cuatro de cada cinco adolescentes quiere dedicarse a la trata de personas, el negocio local

JUAN DIEGO QUESADA | Tenancingo | 30 JUN 2013 - 06:33 CET

445

Archivado en: Trata blancas FBI Adolescencia Tráfico personas Prostitución México Explotación sexual Policía Juventud Latinoamérica Delitos sexuales
Fuerzas seguridad Problemas sociales Delitos América Educación Sociedad Justicia



Una alumna del colegio de Tenancingo. / PRADIP J. PHANSE

Noé Quetzal Méndez tiene 38 años, la cara redonda y un lunar cerca del ojo izquierdo. En la fotografía anexa a su ficha policial parece un cantante venido a menos. La cirugía estética con la que intentó burlar al FBI le ha acartonado el rostro. Quienes lo conocen bien dicen que no se parece en nada a aquel adolescente regordete que desde muy pronto, casi siendo un niño, comenzó a prostituir mujeres en Tenancingo, un pueblo de campesinos situado a 100 kilómetros del Distrito Federal. Expandió su negocio por Estados Unidos y cruzó en la frontera a más de cien menores



de edad. Cada cierto tiempo volvía a su tierra como el hijo pródigo.

En la entrada de su municipio, de 11.700 habitantes, se suceden mansiones ostentosas y horteras junto a casitas humildes acabadas con retales. Los adolescentes del pueblo saben que las primeras construcciones pertenecen a los proxenetas, los mismos que llenan cada año de dólares el manto del arcángel San Miguel cuando sale en procesión. Las segundas son propiedades de campesinos, unos don nadie a ojos de los jóvenes. El oficio de tratante de personas en este lugar es hereditario. Familiar. Pasa de padres a hijos, de generación en generación.

“Quiero ser sicario padrote (proxeneta)”, dijo delante de sus compañeros de clase un chico de 13 años el mes pasado. Se le adivinaba un bigotillo fino sobre la comisura de los labios.

No es el único que lo piensa. Cuatro de cada cinco estudiantes del pueblo dijeron querer dedicarse a la trata de mujeres en una encuesta reciente. El tipo sin expresión por su paso por el quirófano es para ellos un espejo en el que mirarse. Los hombres de este municipio del Estado de Tlaxcala, en el centro de México, suelen casarse por primera vez a los 14 o 15 años y a lo largo de su vida van acumulando noviazgos y matrimonios con mujeres a las que poco a poco introducen en la prostitución. El núcleo familiar –padres, madres, abuelos, tíos– se encargan de la empresa y cuidan de los niños que van naciendo, padres en potencia.

La primera impresión al llegar al colegio del Tenancingo es que se trata de un internado suizo.

El director de la escuela Jaime Torres Bodet, un hombre de pelo cano, organiza la visita con gesto severo. Su institución es muy respetada, como si fuera una isla de moralidad en medio de la depravación general. Los pasillos del centro están impecables, las plantas parecen podadas por un hábil jardinero. Los alumnos saludan a coro a los visitantes y pasan ordenadamente a una clase. A continuación se sientan alrededor de tres mesas. Son parte de esos estudiantes que querían dedicarse a la trata. Rondan los 13 años.

Entre ellos hay varios cuyos familiares están en el negocio. La asociación Cauce Ciudadano, que trabaja para prevenir la violencia de los jóvenes mexicanos, lleva unas semanas impartiendo talleres para tratar de inculcarles valores. Se encontraron con niños que veían el asunto con naturalidad, que consideraban que la mujer podía ser moneda de cambio. Es lo que han visto toda la vida. Al acabar el curso la mayoría parece haber cambiado de parecer. Escribieron en unos carteles: "Mi sueño es que se acabe la trata de personas, que haya más respeto y cines", "Que no haya padrones ni policías corruptos", "Problemáticas: la trata de blancas, vandalismo, graffiti, falta de agua, los vagos, borrachos drogadictos...". Erika Llanos, directora operativa de la asociación, resalta la importancia de trabajar en el desarrollo humano de los niños. "Tienen que aprender a vivir, a respetarse a ellos mismo y a los demás", señala.

En una hora y 20 minutos de charla hablarán de violencia, discriminación, de la falta de la autoestima con la que crecen. En ningún momento dirán la palabra padrone pero el asunto sobrevuela todas las conversaciones. Es tabú hablarlo con alguien de fuera. Una de las chicas del grupo ve a su madre solo de vez en cuando. Trabaja como prostituta en Tijuana. Ella está al cuidado de unos tíos. Ha protagonizado algunos problemas de conducta. "No estoy loca", advierte por si a alguien se le ocurre colgarle algún estereotipo. Su sueño, junto con el de otra compañera, es abrir un restaurante elegante en el pueblo donde poder ir a celebrar en las grandes ocasiones. "Los hombres serán meseros y las mujeres cocineras pero todos limpiarán lo mismo porque son iguales. Unos no valen más que otros", muestra lo aprendido. Los niños han pasado de decir que quieren dedicarse a la prostitución a anhelar convertirse en médicos, abogados o arquitectos.

Otra adolescente reclama mayor respeto a otras confesiones religiones que se practican en Tenancingo. ¿Cómo cuáles? "La Santa Muerte... tiene muchos seguidores".

Oriundos de este lugar y los alrededores controlan La Merced, el mayor centro de prostitución de la Ciudad de México. Entre las calles y hoteles de la zona se cuentan miles de prostitutas. "El 90% de los detenidos por trata son originarios del Estado de Tlaxcala. La mayoría provienen de familias enteras que se dedican a esto", resalta Juana Camila Bautista, fiscal de delitos sexuales del DF. En el último año han conseguido sacar de la prostitución a 200 mujeres, entre ellas 92 menores. La mayoría también de esta zona del país. Uno de los trabajos más arduos de la fiscalía consiste en convencer a las chicas de que están siendo explotadas sexualmente. "Muchas siguen enamoradas y no es fácil hacerles ver que eso no está bien, que eso no es querer a nadie", ahonda la fiscal en su despacho. Los últimos proxenetas encarcelados han recibido sentencias de 60 años sin posibilidad de reducción de pena. Considera un logro que en la última reforma de la ley se considere un agravante el parentesco en el delito de explotación.

El amor es uno de las artimañas que utilizan los explotadores para mantenerlas indefinidamente en el negocio. Los proxenetas llegan a tener más de media docena de esposas, concubinas o novias, como se las quiera llamar, trabajando en el mundo de la prostitución. Con sus coches de gran cilindrada, ropa y joyas caras impresionan a niñas que provienen de un entorno marginal. Los hombres se han ganado la fama de seductores. "Usan el verbo, te enamoran", sostiene una vecina que repudia la fama que se ha ganado su pueblo.

Marcela, una joven guapa del sur de México, creyó encontrar en ese muchacho que la

pretendía el amor que nunca tuvo en su casa, abandonada por el padre y malquerida por la madre. El chico parecía un exitoso comerciante de ropa que viajaba por todo el país colocando mercancía. Se conocieron en un parque y estuvieron viéndose a escondidas hasta que él fue a pedirle la mano a los padres de ella. La pareja se mudó a Tenancingo y se hospedó en casa de la familia del muchacho. La primera propuesta extraña que recibió Marcela fue la de trabajar como "chica de compañía" en un table, unos locales nocturnos donde las mujeres bailan en un escenario y donde se ejerce la prostitución, aunque de eso no se hable abiertamente. En ese momento era menor de edad. "Me dijo que necesitábamos dinero para pagar nuestra boda", recuerda. Se negó y la tensión con su familia política fue en aumento.

La pareja se mudó al DF y ahí directamente fue enviada a trabajar como prostituta en un hotel de La Merced. Su cuñada fue quien la inició en el negocio. La encerró en una habitación de un hotel de mala muerte, El Universia, y le enseñó a poner un preservativo, a masturbar a un hombre, a maquillarse y vestirse para atraer clientes. Mientras trabajaba, su novio y el hermano iban al cine y comían en restaurantes del centro. Al finalizar la jornada pasaban por la recaudación. El encierro de Marcela solo duró seis días. Al séptimo, la policía entró en el edificio y detuvo a todos los proxenetas que andaban por allí. Era febrero de este año. Fue el primer golpe del alcalde de la ciudad, Miguel Ángel Mancera, contra la trata de personas. Llevaba pocos meses en el cargo.

El negocio de los tratantes de Tlaxcala trasciende las fronteras de México. Las chicas son enviadas a ciudades de Estados Unidos. En Nueva York, Chicago, Atlanta o Los Ángeles se han documentado casos de explotación a mujeres mexicanas. Hay clubes completos donde la mayoría de las prostitutas tienen algún tipo de vínculo con Tenancingo. El negocio más próspero para los padrones, de todos modos, se encuentra en el sur de ese país, en la misma frontera mexicana. Los tratantes las cruzan a través de la frontera y las dejan en manos de los delibreros (traducción fonética de delivers, repartidores), unos tipos que reparten publicidad y concretan citas sexuales con los inmigrantes centroamericanos y mexicanos que trabajan en el campo. "Hacen todo ese viaje para sufrir el abuso de los propios latinoamericanos", lamenta Rosi Orozco, presidenta de la organización Comisión Unidos vs Trata y exdiputada por el PAN especializada en la lucha contra la explotación de mujeres. Orozco ha comandado algunas campañas contra los anuncios clasificados de prostitución en prensa o los comerciales de televisión que le han valido algunas enemistades.

El joven párroco de Tenancingo llamado José Alfredo ha aprendido a esquivar el tema. La experta Orozco calcula, según sus indagaciones, que un 30% de los vecinos se dedica a la trata. Un lunes, una secretaria agenda las misas de muertos de los vecinos que se acercan por esta bonita iglesia llena de imágenes clásicas. Dice el padre que no quiere "hablar de eso", que la Iglesia es una institución vertebral de la ciudadanía que tiene que estar para todos los problemas. Reconoce que el patrón pasea por las calles bañado en billetes pero asegura que no es su institución la que se queda con el dinero, sino que va a parar a los mayordomos que custodian las tallas durante el año. Su trabajo es el de mantener la fe de los habitantes del pueblo y guiarles, en la medida de lo posible, por el buen camino. Eso incluye apartarlos de la Santa Muerte, adorada por policías y sicarios a la vez. "Algunas mañanas me encuentro en la parroquia objetos de culto hacia ella e inmediatamente las saco. Este es un lugar sagrado", dice.

A ella seguramente se tuvo que encomendar más de una vez el hombre sin rostro cuando el FBI pisaba sus talones. El que era un modelo a seguir para los jóvenes de Tenancingo llegó a tener una docena de esposas, como si de un sátrapa persa se tratara. Entre ellas una de 13 años. Las chicas han contado que las vestía a todas de sirvientas y las invitaba a besarle los pies. Lo detuvieron en Puebla acusado de trata y homicidio y cuando estaba rodeado por la policía ofreció cinco millones de pesos a un comisario para que lo dejara escapar. Tras recibir

una negativa, pidió que se le aplicara la ley fuga: simular su huida y que fuese ultimado por la espalda. Un sistema muy utilizado durante el porfiriato y la revolución mexicana. Quetzal prefería eso a pasar prácticamente lo que le queda de vida en prisión. Acabó siendo detenido. No tenía escapatoria.

El chico que delante de sus compañeros dijo querer imitarle, en cambio, parece tener dónde elegir. En el taller rompió a llorar cuando cada uno de los menores exponía sus problemas. No quiso apenas hablar y cuando lo intentó no le salían las palabras. El día anterior había escrito en un papel: “¡Ayúdanos!”.

The town where children want to be pimps

Juan Diego Quesada/Tenancingo/June 30 2013

In Tenancingo, a small municipality in Mexico, four out of five adolescents want to go into human trafficking, the local business.

Noé Quetzal Méndez is 38 years old, with a round face and a mole near his left eye. In the photo attached to his Police file he looks like a fallen on hard times singer. The cosmetic surgery he underwent to trying to fool the FBI has stiffened his face. Those who know him well say that he doesn't look like the chubby adolescent who from a very early age started to prostitute women in Tenancingo, a rural town situated 100 Km away from the Federal District. He expanded his business to the United States and he crossed over the border more than a hundred minors. Every now and then he would come back to his town as the prodigal son.

As you enter his town, of 11.700 inhabitants, you can see one ostentatious and tacky mansion after the other, right beside humble little houses made of scraps. The town's adolescents know that the former are owned by pimps, those that every year fill San Michael Archangel's cape with dollars at procession time. The latter are the peasants' houses, nobodies in the youngsters' eyes. The human trafficking trade in this place is hereditary. Familiar. It passes down from father to son, from generation to generation.

"I want to be a padrote (pimp)" said a 13 years old boy in front of all his classmates last month. A thin moustache above his upper lip is barely visible.

He is not the only one that thinks like this. A recent poll showed that four out of five students in this town said they wanted to go into women trafficking. They want to emulate the man who ended up with a expressionless face after passing through the operation room. The men of this town in the State of Tlaxcala in Central Mexico usually marry for the first time when they are 14 or 15 and throughout their lives they accumulate girlfriends and marriages to women that they little by little drive into prostitution. The family – fathers, mothers, grandparents, uncles – are in charge of the enterprise and take care of the children that are being born, the potential pimps.

The first impression when one arrives to Tenancingo School is that it is like a Swiss boarding school. The school's Principal, Jaime Torres Bodet, a gray-haired man, organizes the visit with a stern look on his face. His institution is very well respected, as if it were an island of morality in the midst of widespread depravity. The school hallways are immaculate and the plants seem to have been pruned by a skilled gardener. The students greet the visitors in a chorus and go into their classrooms in an orderly manner. Then they sit around three tables. They are a part of those that wanted to go into trafficking. They are about 13 years old.

Among them there are several whose relatives are in the business. Cauce Ciudadano, an association that aims to prevent violence among Mexican youngsters, has been giving workshops to try and teach values. They encountered children that saw the issue as something natural; they considered that women could be a bargaining chip. This is what they have seen during all their

lives. When the course is over, most of them seem to have changed their minds. They made banners: "My dream is to end human trafficking, to have more respect and movies", "No more pimps or corrupt policemen", "Problems: human trafficking, vandalism, graffiti, lack of water, bums, drunks, drug addicts ..." Erika Llanos, the association operations manager, underlines the importance of children human development. "They have to learn to live, to respect themselves and the fellow man", she says.

In one hour and twenty minutes chat, they discuss violence, discrimination, and lack of self-esteem. They never mention the word pimp but the issue looms over every conversation. It is taboo to discuss it with an outsider. One of the girls of the group sees her mother only once in a while. She works as a prostitute in Tijuana. She is under the care of her uncle. She has had some behavior problems. "I am not crazy" she warns us just in case anyone tries to pin a cliche to her back. Her dream is to open a fancy restaurant in town with a classmate, where big occasions may be celebrated. "The men would be the waiters and the women would cook but they would all clean up together because they are all equal. No-one is worthier than anyone else. She shows what she has learned. The kids have gone from saying that they wanted to go into prostitution to dreaming of becoming doctors, lawyers or architects.

Another adolescent asks for more respect for the other religions professed in Tenancingo. Such as? "Saint Death ... has many followers".

Natives from this town control "La Merced", the biggest prostitution center in Mexico City. On the nearby streets and hotels you find thousands of prostitutes. "90% of the people arrested for human trafficking are from the State of Tlaxcala. The majority comes from entire families that are in this business", says Juana Camila Bautista, the FD Sexual Crimes prosecutor. In the last year they have been able to rescue 200 women from prostitution, 92 of them minors. The majority are from this region. One of the hardest jobs the prosecutor's office has is to try and convince the girls that they are being exploited sexually. "Many of them are still in love and it is not easy to make them see that this is not right, that this is not a way to love someone", says the prosecutor. The last pimps that have been arrested received sentences up to 60 years without the possibility of a sentence reduction. She considers the latest law amendment -that considers kinship an aggravating factor in sexual exploitation crimes - as a big step forward.

Love is one of the tricks the exploiters use to keep them endlessly in the business. The pimps may have more than half a dozen wives, concubines or girlfriends, or whatever you want to call them, working in the prostitution world. With their power cruiser cars, fancy clothes and jewelry they impress young girls that come from marginal neighborhoods. The men have earned the reputation of seducers. "They sweet-talk you and make you fall in love with them", says a neighbor that hates her town's fame.

Marcela, a good looking girl from Southern Mexico, thought she had found in that young man who courted her the love she had never received at home because she had been abandoned by her father and not loved by her mother. The young man looked like a successful clothing merchant that traveled throughout the country selling merchandise. They met in a park and they used to meet in secret until he went and asked her parents for her hand in marriage. The couple moved

to Tenancingo and went to live with the man's family. The first strange proposal Marcela received was for her to work as an "escort girl" at a "table": nightclubs where women dance on a stage and where you can find prostitutes, although it is not talked about in the open. At that time, she was a minor. "He told me that we needed money to pay for our wedding" she recalls. She said no and the tension with her in-laws grew.

The couple moved to DF and from there she was sent directly to work as a prostitute in a hotel in "La Merced". It was her sister-in-law who initiated her in the business. She locked her in a skid row hotel room, "El Universia", and taught her how to put a condom on, how to masturbate a man, and how to put on makeup and dress up to attract clients. While she worked, her boyfriend and his brother would go the movies and to eat at restaurants downtown. At the end of the day, they would come by to collect the money. Marcela's confinement only lasted six days. On the seventh, the police came into the building and arrested all the pimps that were around. It was in February of this year. The city's mayor, Miguel Angel Mancera, had struck his first blow against human traffickers. He had just been in charge for a few months.

The Tlaxcala human trafficking business transcends the Mexican borders. The girls are sent to cities in the United States. In New York, Chicago, Atlanta or Los Angeles, cases of exploitation of Mexican women have been documented. There are clubs where the majority of the prostitutes have some kind of link to Tenancingo. The pimps' most prosperous business, however, is in the Southern part of the country, on the Mexican border. The human traffickers cross them over the border and hand them over to "delibreros" (phonetic translation for deliverymen), guys that hand over flyers and arrange sexual dates with Central American and Mexican immigrants that work in the fields. "They do all that trip to be abused by the same Latin-American people" regrets Rosi Orozco, the president of "United Against Human Trafficking" and former PAN representative, specialized in the fight against women exploitation. Orozco has led some campaigns against prostitution classified ads in the press or television, that have earned her quite a few enemies.

Tenancingo's young parish priest, José Alfredo, has learned to dodge the topic. Based on her own investigations, Orozco, the expert, estimates that 30% of the neighbors are in the business. On Monday, a secretary schedules Masses for the Dead, for the neighbors that come to this pretty church filled with classical images. The priest says that he doesn't want to talk about "that", that the Church is the citizens' core institution and that he has to deal with all the problems. He admits that the boss walks the streets as if bathed in money but he says it is not his institution that gets the money, but that it ends in the hands of the custodians that guard the sculptures all year round. His job is to keep the inhabitants' faith high and to guide them, as much as possible, along the right path. This also includes keeping them away from Saint Death, adored both by policemen and hit men alike. "Some mornings I find in the parish cult objects and I throw them away immediately. This is a sacred place", he says.

The faceless man surely had to commend his soul to her when the FBI was closing in on him, the man who was a role model for the Tenancingo youngsters, who had a dozen wives as if he were a Persian satrap; among them a 13 years old girl. The girls have said that he dressed them all as maids and made them kiss his feet. He was arrested in Puebla for human trafficking and homicide and when he was surrounded by the police he offered five million pesos to a captain to

let him escape. When he was turned down, he asked for the escape law to be applied to him: to simulate his escape and be shot in the back. This system was often used during the "times of Porfirio" and the Mexican Revolution. Quetzal preferred that to spend the rest of his life in prison. He was arrested. He had no way out.

The kid that in front of his classmates had said that he wanted to imitate him, on the other hand, now seems to be able to choose. At the workshop, he burst into tears when the other kids talked about their own problems. He hardly talked and when he tried to he couldn't utter a word. The day before he had written on a piece of paper: "Help us!"